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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

15 May 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS OF THE SOMOZA REGIME IN NICARAGUA

1. The Somoza regime, which has firmly controlled Nicaragua for a quarter of a century, is being increasingly threatened by revolutionary conspiracies among Nicaraguan exiles in several Caribbean countries. Some, with the encouragement and participation of anti-dictator as well as pro-Communist elements in other countries, are preparing to invade Nicaragua and overthrow President Luis Somoza and his brother Anastasio, who heads the 5,000-man National Guard.

2. President Somoza has liberalized somewhat the authoritarian regime he inherited from his father; he has attempted to forestall resentment against his government by announcing that at the end of his term in 1963 he will turn over his office to a freely elected successor, not of the Somoza family. However, he does not escape the animosity of his late father's enemies, who include President Betancourt of Venezuela and ex-President Figueres of Costa Rica, the two outstanding and closely associated liberal leaders of the

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Caribbean area. Figueres encourages and supports non-Communist individuals and groups opposed to the Somoza regime. Some of these are associated with the National Opposition Union (UNO) which is a loose coalition including not only a major faction of the traditional Conservative Party of Nicaragua, but also smaller anti-Somoza groups inside and outside of the country. The Conservative Party and other elements of the UNO have accepted as their leader Enrique Lacayo Farfan, who was convicted of complicity in the assassination of Somoza père. In general the Conservatives are reluctant to collaborate with communist associated revolutionary groups.

3. The communist associated revolutionary groups include a small leftist minority of the UNO, the Nicaraguan Patriotic Union located in Caracas and well-financed by the Venezuelan Communist Party, and a large number of exiles in Cuba the principal leaders of which are at least pro-Communist. Fidel Castro has commissioned Che Guevara, important pro-Communist leader in the "26 of July Movement" to facilitate preparation of revolutionary action against the Somoza regime by the exiles.

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4. In competing for the adherence of those Nicaraguans impatient for the overthrow of the Somoza regime, the communist-associated exile groups have a decided advantage over the non-communists. The material aid which they receive from the Cuban government and from the Venezuelan Communist Party and the active preparations apparently under way in Cuba stand in contrast to the meager support which Figueres and Betancourt are providing to their friends. As it comes to appear that only the Communist-associated exile groups give promise of early effective action against the Somoza regime, the non-Communist groups will tend to lose followers to the Communist-associated groups. This trend in itself would tend to reduce the reluctance of non-Communist organizations to cooperate with the Communist-associated movement.

5. Despite these external threats to its stability the Somoza regime remains in a fairly strong position. Within Nicaragua its political machine is well organized and effective. Its domination of the economic life of the country tends to deter opposition activity as long as the outcome remains in doubt. The indifferent response in the country to revolutionists who invaded Nicaragua from Honduras last October suggests that popular feeling against the government is not high. In fact relaxation of some

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of the previous governments' more arbitrary practices has evoked some favorable response. Most important of all, the 5,000-man National Guard is a relatively powerful and effective instrument of control which -- with the possible exception of the Air Force -- will probably remain loyal to the regime.

6. We believe it unlikely that the Somoza regime is in danger of being overthrown by a purely internal revolt -- at least as long as the presently unfavorable economic situation does not deteriorate sharply. The National Guard almost certainly has the capability to suppress any active show of dissatisfaction. Thus the invasion of exiles would be necessary to pose a serious threat to the regime. An invasion attempt from Costa Rica by exile supporters of Lacayo Farfan would be unlikely to receive assistance from the Costa Rican government and probably could not succeed. Only the Communist-led forces now preparing in Cuba are likely to be able to mount a well equipped invasion with some prospects of success. However, if the National Guard were facing what it recognized to be Communist-led forces committed to the destruction of the Guard, it would probably offer a determined resistance. In this case the Guard could probably defend the government successfully against immediate overthrow, but might

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not be able to prevent the invaders from establishing a lodgement in a relatively remote part of the country. In that event, the situation might develop as did the Castro revolt against Batista.

7. Should an invasion appear imminent, President Somoza will probably call for action by the CAS, whose machinery is well developed as a result of its recent action in Panama. Swift action by the CAS would enhance the morale of the National Guard and probably assure victory for Somoza.

8. Under these circumstances, we believe that the Somoza regime will be able to maintain power for some time. It has at least an even chance of surviving until 1963.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

[Redacted Signature]

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

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